

# Communication Matters

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## Online Courses:

### Working With Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing & Vocational Services for People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Providing ethical services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing can present a unique challenge for service providers, whether they are new to the field of rehabilitation or seasoned professionals. The goal of these courses is to enhance professionals' abilities to understand and effectively provide services for individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

#### **Working with Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

September 8 - October 6, 2008

#### **Vocational Services for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

October 20 - November 24, 2008

[http://www.pepnet.org/pdf/  
pepnet\\_w\\_date\\_blue.pdf](http://www.pepnet.org/pdf/pepnet_w_date_blue.pdf)

## Case Study

### **Worker with Hearing Loss Promoted After Workplace Assessment**

By Nan Asher, Executive Director  
Michigan Association for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

A bank contacted me regarding a female employee with hearing loss. I had worked successfully with this bank before, regarding another employee with hearing loss. This second employee's performance had been poor for the past two years. The bank policy called for firing all employees with a two-year poor performance record. The employer was rightfully concerned, as the worker had a known hearing loss but had never asked for accommodations, nor had she been willing to discuss if her hearing loss could be the reason for her difficulties.

The bank asked if I would call the woman and find out what the issues might be as she was refusing to talk to the Human Resource (HR) department. The employer seemed reluctant to terminate the woman.

An investigation revealed that the employee had been with the bank for 17 years. For the first 15 years she had an "Excellent or Superior" performance rating. She was mortified about her performance evaluations and did not seem to know why there was a problem. She was from the old school, and had struggled independently with hearing loss her whole life. She considered hearing loss to be a personal problem and not an issue to be discussed in the workplace. She internalized the situation as being a character flaw rather than a physical disability.

Initially, the employee refused to talk to me. Finally, she agreed to a short phone call in desperation, fearing she was going to lose her job. I first called her, but she insisted in calling me back in five minutes, using a cell-phone from a bathroom stall. She was embarrassed to have coworkers hear her discussing "personal problems at work."

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Information or news related to Deaf or Hard of Hearing services may be forwarded to Julie Eckhardt at [Eckhardtj@michigan.gov](mailto:Eckhardtj@michigan.gov). Views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily the views of Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth-Rehabilitation Services. Communication Matters is available on the web at [www.michigan.gov/mrs](http://www.michigan.gov/mrs) and on the E-Learn Deaf & Hard of Hearing Resource Center.

# Worker with Hearing Loss Promoted After Workplace Assessment

The employee had a hard time believing that the bank or I had any real interest in assisting her. She assumed that I was hired to back up the bank's negative performance evaluations. She tried to keep her hearing loss issues very low key, believing she would be fired if anyone knew just how impaired her hearing really was. I shared with her that I myself have a hearing loss, and the bank hired me to find out how to best help her. I had to convince her that if the bank wanted to fire her, she would have been gone already! Finally, she agreed to meet with me, and later she would meet with the HR representative.

According to the employee, neither her hearing loss, coworkers, boss or job duties changed. Clearly, SOMETHING had to have changed. I pressed her to reveal what had changed two years ago? She finally (ashamedly) admitted that since "the merger" (surprise - two years ago!) she no longer had her own office and felt demoted in the new location. She had been reassigned to a different building and a small cubicle in a communal workroom.

Regarding her hearing loss, she reported having one "good" ear and one "bad" ear. The good ear had some residual hearing and was fit with a hearing aid. The bad ear had NO hearing whatsoever and therefore she did not use a hearing aid on that ear. Most people at work assumed that the unaided ear was her best and the aided one the "bad" ear! A reverse of the actual case.

The listening situation was even more problematic. The "good" ear faced the noisy workroom with low, 4.5' dividers. The "bad" ear faced three coworkers. Her boss shouted instructions over the tall (6-7 feet) cubicle wall. A decibel meter showed that the noise in the workroom exceeded 90 dB at times, with 70 dB being the average. The environment made it nearly impossible for her to use residual hearing.

## Solutions

In my recommendations, I noted that an enclosed office would allow the employee better control of the listening environment. It was easy to deduce that the workroom cubicle was the primary reason for the downward spiral of her work performance. She had a private office until two years ago when her work station was moved.

As a second option, she could trade cubicles with a

co-worker so that the bad ear faced the work room and the good ear faced the coworkers. In addition, installing Instant Messaging (IM) on the computers would facilitate communications from the boss, instead of over the wall. Sensitivity training for the department was also recommended and scheduled.

## Outcome

Four weeks went by, and I had not heard from the bank or the employee. I called and learned they were still working on solutions. Another four weeks later, I received an update call. The co-worker had balked at switching cubicles and the boss had resigned. With the workplace assessment report in hand, HR was convinced that the best solution was to give the employee with hearing loss the enclosed office. Trusting in her fifteen years of excellent performance, she was promoted into her former bosses' position, and provided an office with a door. She had implemented IM with all her staff, and things were going very smoothly.

Because the employer was committed to helping this employee be successful, we worked as a team. The best solution for the entire department was the result. I am happy to report that three years later her workplace evaluations are once again "Excellent"!

## QUESTIONS??

...about hearing aids, assistive technology, hearing loss or workplace accommodations?

Easy access to answers for MRS staff is provided through a contract with Michigan Association for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MADHH).

**Contact:** Nan Asher at  
**[nan@madhh.org](mailto:nan@madhh.org)** or  
**1-800-968-7327**



# Short Signs

## Shocking Stats

Work, Income and Disability  
(Since 1980)

- ➡ Incomes of those without disabilities  
– **risen**
- ➡ Incomes of those with disabilities  
– **flat**
- ➡ Employment rate of those without disabilities  
– **82%**
- ➡ Employment rate of those with disabilities  
– **declined from 35% to 31%**

From a report on a 10-Year Collaborative Effort between National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT/NTID), Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI) and Social Security Administration.

Learn more at: <http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/newdownloads/conferences/attended/2008/HLAA/SSA%20HLAA%20Presentation%206%2008.pdf>

## Is group audiological rehabilitation worth the time, cost, and effort?

According to an article on Hearing Loss Web, it is well worth the investment to provide consumers with an understanding of hearing loss, basic communication strategies, and an overview of assistive technology. Then, why aren't more audiologists providing the service? Find out more in this online article beginning at:

<http://www.hearinglossweb.com/res/hlorg/shhh/cn/2008/ws/ar.htm>

## JOBS

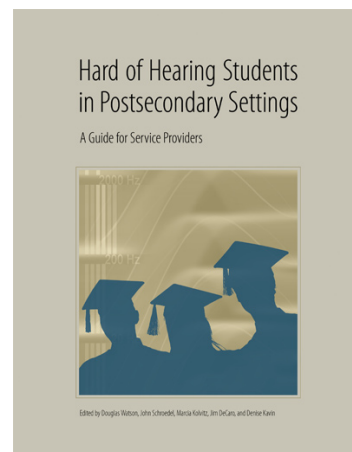
### Deaf & Hard of Hearing Related Postings

For people with interest or experience working with people who are deaf or hard of hearing, especially those fluent in American Sign Language, there are a wide range of career possibilities. From substance abuse counselors and teachers to video relay installers, you can find recent postings on E-Michigan Deaf and Hard of Hearing People web site under **Announcements**: [www.michdhh.org](http://www.michdhh.org)

## Hard of Hearing Students in Postsecondary Settings: A Guide for Service Providers

This comprehensive guide provides a solid grounding in the psycho-social impacts of hearing loss, leading into accommodations and practical interventions to help students with hearing loss succeed in postsecondary settings.

The guide is free online:  
[http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/newdownloads/resources/documents/other/pepnet\\_resources.pdf](http://www.pen.ntid.rit.edu/newdownloads/resources/documents/other/pepnet_resources.pdf)



## Ideas or Comments about Communication Matters?

Send a note to Julie Eckhardt at  
[eckhardtj@michigan.gov](mailto:eckhardtj@michigan.gov)  
Please note the address change!